

Training sessions

Elements of a training session

Each coach will develop their own approach to planning a session; however there is generally a pattern to the elements that are contained within a session for beginners.

Training sessions should be developed from two or three goals that have been identified for that session.

The elements of a session

The elements of a training session that all coaches should include are:

- session introduction
- warm-up
- skill and fitness activities
- cool-down
- review.

Session introduction

An overview of the training session should be presented to participants prior to the session starting. This can either be posted on a notice board or whiteboard, or communicated by the coach as the participants gather to commence training.

Swimming coaches often list the training program on a board adjacent to the pool. This is effective as swimmers can commence their program as soon as they arrive at the pool and do not need to wait for other members of their squad. The coach can also get on with coaching, and not be compelled to have to stop and explain the session to each swimmer as they arrive.

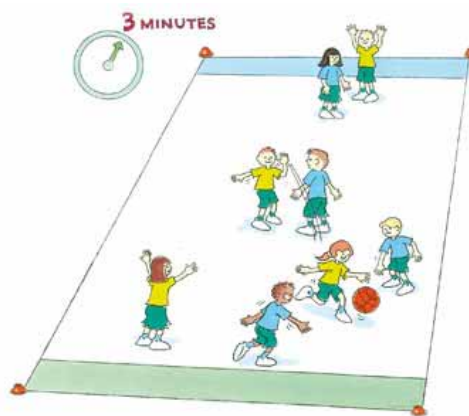
Warm-up

The warm-up should focus on low-intensity, skill-specific activities. There is now less emphasis on static stretching exercises and more emphasis on achieving readiness and ease of

movement by slowly increasing the intensity of movement patterns and skills. For example, simple passing games in basketball and netball would form a good warm-up activity.

Active stretching can then easily be incorporated into these activities. A good example of this is after some general low-intensity movement activities, playing a 'freeze game' where, on a cue (either the command 'freeze' or being 'tipped' by another participant), the participants perform a stretching activity, until they become 'unfrozen' by another participant.

The length and structure of the warm-up varies among sports and the age and condition of participants, however its purpose is the same for all sports. It is designed to prepare the neuromuscular system for action, increase the blood flow throughout the body and prepare the mind for action. A good warm-up will decrease the risk of injury and increase the ability of muscles to work effectively throughout the session.



Skill and fitness activities

This segment of the session is very important and usually the most enjoyable part of the session. The use of game-like activities is a great way to develop skills and fitness. There are two reasons for this:

- games, more often than not, increase the motivation levels in participants

- skills practised in competition-related activities will transfer better than skills practised in non-competition-related situations.

This is essentially the theory behind the game sense approach.

Competition related activities

The other option for this part of the training session is to design competition-related activities that focus on a particular skill and/or strategy. An example would be to do unit trainings in rugby union. Players would practise line outs, scrums and back line plays.

The amount of time devoted to these activities will be determined by the length of the training session and the age and level of the participants. However, these technique and tactical-related activities should make up the bulk of the session. Coaches should attempt to devote some of their time to raise the intensity and conditions to a level that closely resembles what will occur in real competition.

Cool-down

A cool-down (sometimes referred to as the warm-down) of five to ten minutes helps to distribute waste products through the body, gradually returning the body to resting levels and reducing the sometimes harmful impact of dramatic changes to the body's activity level.

The cool-down occurs immediately after training activities have been completed and includes low-intensity body movement, such as slow jogging or walking (which, once again can be incorporated into low-key games to keep interest levels up), stretching exercises, shooting at goal or light rowing back to the shed.

It is during this part of the session that more time can be spent on static stretching (that is, to improve flexibility levels).

The cool-down is often neglected but it is very important and must be included in each session and after competition.

Review

The coach should review the training session with participants, highlighting important points from the session. This could occur either during or immediately following the warm-down.

The review also involves a discussion by coaches and participants about the important parts of the training session and should include some reflection on what worked, and what did not, during the session. This information then feeds into the planning process for future sessions.

